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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to identify characteristics of the most academically successful graduates of a teacher education program at the University of Alberta (Canada). Graphical data provide information about all of the graduates; tabular displays provide more specific information about those who graduated with distinction. For example, students graduating with distinction are more likely to be female than male; they include both young and more mature students; and students who are successful in the first year of the program continue this pattern in education and non-education courses throughout college. Implications of this data for teacher education programs, teacher educators, and collaborative partners in school districts, government, professional associations, and other faculties of the universities include the need to counter myths and negative publicity about the academic capabilities of prospective teachers; recognize diversity in gender, range of ages, program routes, majors, and educational history among outstanding students; and scrutinize teacher education programs for systematic barriers to success.
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Characteristics of Students Who Graduate with Distinction:

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

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Purpose

This report presents data from a project where the most academically successful graduates of a teacher education program were studied. The purpose of the study was to identify characteristics of those who have been most successful in the.B. Ed. program.

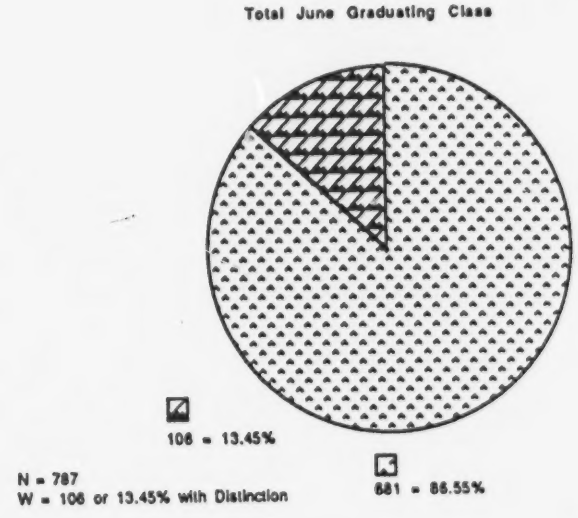
Population

The population of the study was the June 1992 graduating class of the University of Alberta Faculty of Education and particularly those who "Graduated With Distinction" as noted on their diplomas. The University of Alberta uses a nine-point grading system; a grade of 4 represents a pass in a course, a GPA of 5.5 was required for graduation at the time of the study. Students who maintain a GPA of 7.5 or above on the last 60 credits (minimum of 120 credits required for graduation) of course work are deemed to have Graduated With Distinction.

Data

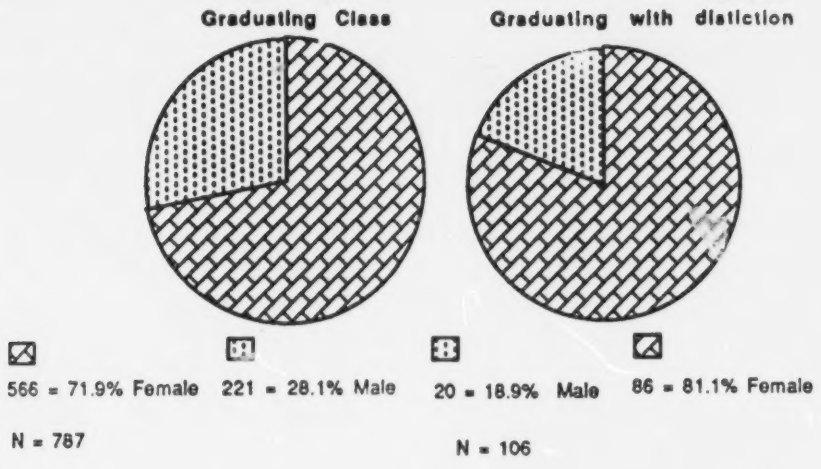
The graphical data displays provide information about all of the graduates while the tabular displays provide more specific information about those who graduated with distinction.

1. June 1992 Graduates in Education.



Of the 787 June graduates 106 (13.45%) Graduated With Distinction.

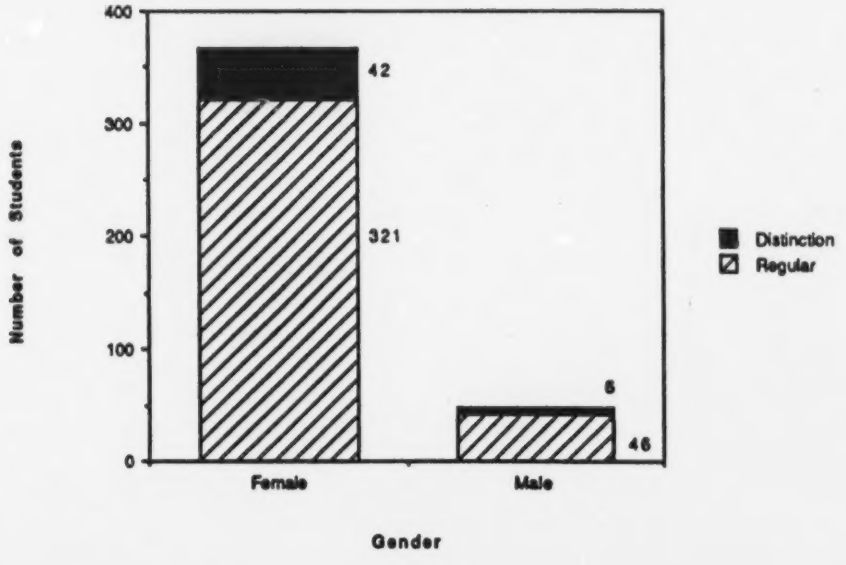
2. Gender and the Graduates.



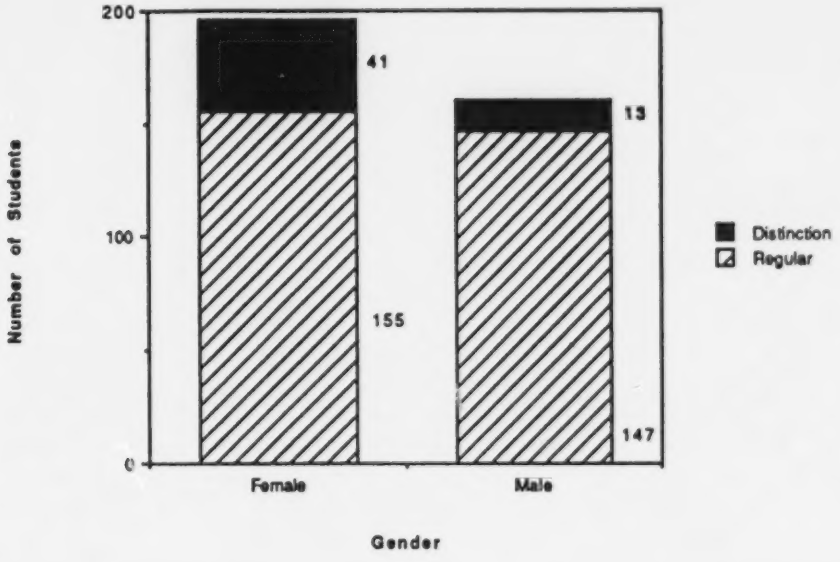
There were 556 (71.9%) women and 221 (28.1%) men in in the graduating class. Of the 106 who Graduated With Distinction, 86 (81.1%) were women and 20 (18.9%) were men.

3. Programs of the graduates.
At the time of the study there were three programs, Elementary Education, Secondary Education and the very much smaller Industrial and Vocational Education Program.

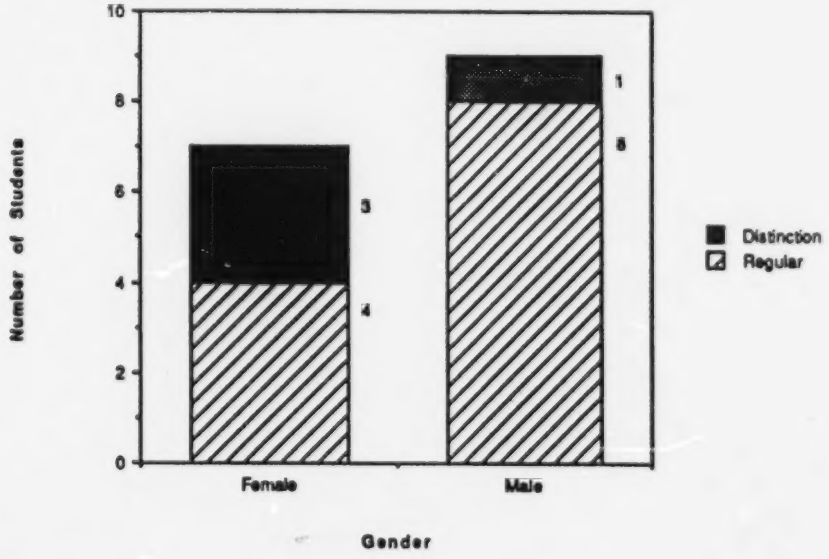
Elementary Education. Four hundred fifteen, or 52.7% of the graduates were in the Elementary Education program. Of the Elementary graduates 363 (87.47%) were women and 52 (12.53%) were men There were 48 (45.28% of the 106) who Graduated With Distinction, 42 women and 6 men (87.5% and 12.5% of the 48).



Secondary Education. Three hundred fifty-six, or 45.2% of the graduates were in the Secondary Education program. Of the Secondary graduates 196 (55.06%) were women and 160 (44.94%) were men There were 54 (50.94% of the 106) who Graduated With Distinction, 41 women and 13 men (75.92% and 24.08% of the 54).



Industrial and Vocational Education. Sixteen, or 2.03% of the graduates were in the Industrial and Vocational Education program. Of these graduates 7 (43.75%) were women and 9 (56.25%) were men. There were 4(3.77% of the 106) who Graduated With Distinction, 3 women and 1 man (75% and 25% of the 4).



The balance of the data includes only those students who Graduated With Distinction (WD's) Students who enter the B. Ed. program are considered to have come from one of three sources. After Degree students are those who have one or more academic degrees at the baccalaureate level or higher; these students must complete 60 credits to earn a B. Ed. degree. Transfer students enter from other parts of the university or other institutions, and may be given credit for up to 60 of the 120 credits required for the B. Ed. degree. High school entry students are those who have not earned academic credit beyond high school graduation.

4. Age of students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's	21 - 47	28.37	23	26	32	106
After Degree WD's	23 - 47	30.46	25	28	34	35
Transfer WD's	21 - 45	27.54	23	24.5	31	50
High School Entry WD's	21 - 42	26.86	22	23	32	21

5. First year grade point average of students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's (except AD's)	4.1 - 8.9	7.34	7.1	7.4	7.8	69
After Degree WD's	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Transfer WD's	4.1 - 8.9	7.48	7.3	7.6	7.8	49
High School Entry WD's	- 8.4	7.01	6.5	7.1	7.6	20

6. Grade point average in education courses of students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's	6.9 -8.6	7.81	7.6	7.7	8.0	105
After Degree WD's	7.2 - 8.6	7.89	7.6	7.7	8.3	34
Transfer WD's	7.0 - 8.6	7.77	7.6	7.7	8.0	50
High School Entry WD's	6.9 - 8.5	7.78	7.5	7.8	8.0	21

7 Grade point average in non-education courses of students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's	5.8 - 9.0	7.55	7.3	7.6	8.0	94
After Degree WD's	6.0 - 9.0	7.75	7.7	8.1	8.7	24
Transfer WD's	6.0 - 8.6	7.54	7.3	7.6	7.9	49
High School Entry WD's	5.8 - 8.7	7.36	7.0	7.4	7.7	21

8. Grade point average in non-education and education courses of students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's						93
Non-education	5.8 - 9.0	7.55	7.3	7.6	8.0	
Education	6.9 - 8.6	7.81	7.6	7.7	8.0	
After Degree WD's						23
Non-education	6.0 - 9.0	8.04	7.7	8.0	8.6	
Education	7.2 - 8.5	7.9	7.6	7.9	8.3	
Transfer WD's						49
Non-education	6.0 - 8.6	7.54	7.3	7.6	7.9	
Education	7.0 - 8.6	7.77	7.6	7.7	8.0	
High School Entry WD's						21
Non-education	5.8 - 8.7	7.36	7.0	7.4	7.8	
Education	6.9 - 8.5	7.78	7.5	7.8	8.0	

9. Time in program, in years, of students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's	1.5 - 6.5	2.97	2.0	2.5	4.0	106
After Degree WD's	1.5 - 5.0	2.19	2.0	2.0	2.0	35
Transfer WD's	1.5 - 6.0	2.90	2.0	3.0	3.0	50
High School Entry WD's	3.5 - 6.5	4.45	4.0	4.0	4.5	21

10. Credits transferred to the B.Ed from other programs and institutions by students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's	0 - 63	20.5	0	9	39	106
After Degree WD's	0 - 36	2.7	0	0	3	35
Transfer WD's	15 - 63	41.0	27	40.5	57	50
High School Entry WD's	0 - 3	0.3	0	0	0	21

11. Number of credits taken that are extra to B.Ed. degree requirements by students graduating with distinction.

Source of Data	Range	Mean	Q_1	Median	Q_3	N
All WD's	0 - 27	2.1	0	0	3	106
After Degree WD's	0 - 9	1.5	0	0	3	35
Transfer WD's	0 - 18	2.0	0	0	3	50
High School Entry WD's	0 - 27	3.2	0	0	1.5	21

12. Focus areas selected by elementary education students graduating with distinction.

Focus Area	M	F	Focus Area	M	F
Special education	0	11	Music	0	1
Language arts	1	7	Second language	0	1
Reading	1	6	TESL	0	1
Individual differences	0	3	Visual arts	0	1
Intercultural education	0	3	Moral education	0	1
Learning resources	2	3	Self directed	1	1
Math & computer apps	1	1			
Early childhood	0	1			
Movement	0	1	TOTALS	6	42

13. Majors selected by secondary education students graduating with distinction.

Major	M	F	Major	M	F
Art	0	0	Mathematics	0	3
Biological sciences	4	7	Modern languages	0	0
Business education	0	5	Music	0	1
Drama	0	2	Physical education	0	1
English	3	12	Physical sciences	1	0
General sciences	2	0	Social studies	3	10
Home economics	0	0			
			TOTALS	13	41

Implications for Collaboration

As we consider the characteristics of these outstanding students, there are three primary conclusions that should influence teacher educators and their partners in school districts, government, professional associations and other faculties of the university. These are: 1) many myths about prospective teachers are counter to evidence. 2) Outstanding students are very diverse and include men and women of a range of ages, program routes, majors, and educational history. 3) Given the diversity of highly achieving students, programs need to identify and monitor areas in which no student achieves distinction to be certain there are no systemic barriers to success.

1) Many myths about prospective teachers are counter to evidence.

A range of teacher educators are asserting that much of the negative evidence publicized regarding schools and teacher education is not based on fact. (Berliner, 1991, Lucas & Schmitz, 1991,. Olson 1985, Fisher & Feldmann, 1985) Those of us in teacher education and the students wishing to become teachers need to be among those attempting to counter negative publicity. For this purpose we need to be aware of the successes of the system, the characteristics of achievers, and make that evidence known through the professional networks within which we function.

2) Outstanding students are very diverse and include men and women from a range of ages, program routes, majors, and educational history.

Just as with the myths about teacher education, there are myths regarding the "good students" in teacher education. It is important that teacher educators and their many partners anticipate that any prospective

teacher may be an outstanding academic and/or an outstanding practitioner. The diversity among graduates with distinction is so remarkable that it is difficult to define pockets of excellence within the total population. All opportunities for prospective teachers should allow students to achieve their potential within that context. Limiting the scope of some opportunities in the anticipation of less competent students is unjustified.

3) Given the diversity of highly achieving students, programs need to identify and monitor areas in which no student achieves distinction to be certain there are no systemic barriers to success.

When outstanding students are very different from each other, and there is no prototype for success, it becomes more remarkable over time if a specific program route or major fails to have a student graduate with distinction. Thus the lack of students who achieve distinction may be as significant to the teacher education program and its partners as the successes of its students.

Summary

This retrospective study of education students who graduate with distinction has shown that these students are more likely to be female than male but represent both the young and more mature students. For the most part these students are successful in their first year of the program, and continue this pattern in education and non-education courses throughout their programs. They tend to complete the program without missing regular winter terms, but they also tend to take fewer than the full five course load each term. Some completed these courses in spring and summer sessions, but others took additional terms to complete their degrees. The outstanding students who had entered from high school progressed as successfully and completed the program at a younger age than did their more experienced counterparts.

The implications of this data for teacher educators and their collaborative partners include the need to counter myths about prospective educators, recognition of the diversity among outstanding students, and scrutiny of programs for systematic barriers to success.

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